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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2467
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0181
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0173
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 4789
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 1519
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000901

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/2019

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON CONDITIONS IN MALAKAND DIVISION: DIR,
BUNER, SWAT

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 887

[1](#)B. PESHAWAR 75

Classified By: CDA Gerald Feierstein for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In operations in Lower Dir District (Malakand Division, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP)) on April 27, Frontier Corps/Army reportedly killed over 70 militants, including two major taliban commanders, and regained control over the Maidan valley. UN organizations report that the displacement from these operations in Lower Dir have now reached between 20,000 and 40,000 individuals. In response to the Dir operations, Tehreek-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) announced a suspension in talks with the NWFP Government until the operations ceased, claiming that the operations violated the Swat peace agreement. Conditions in Swat continue to deteriorate as militants have established blockades around Mingora, are patrolling roads, and have increased the kidnapping of police and other local officials.

Military action has begun in Buner District on April 28 in the face of the recent decision by the Buner jirga denouncing all military intervention. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Pakistan Military's press bureau, held a press conference on April 28 announcing their initial operational plans in Buner and to outline their successes in Dir. End Summary

[1](#)2. (SBU) Background: Malakand Division includes the districts of Upper and Lower Dir, Swat, Malakand, Mardan, Swabi, Buner, and Shangla. Although the designation of "division" was removed by former President Musharraf in the Local Governance Act, the term is still commonly used by the public at large. According to the taliban and TNSM, all of Malakand is subject to the Swat peace agreement and the Nizam-e-Adl.

DIR UPDATE

[1](#)3. (SBU) On April 28, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Pakistan Military's press bureau, held a press conference outlining their successes in their two-day operations in Lower Dir District. Reportedly, these successes included the killing of over 70 militants, including two major taliban commanders, and the regaining control of the Maidan valley. Post contacts report that operations in Lower Dir slowed as shelling continued on April 28 on militant strongholds in villages around the Maidan valley. There were also reports that militants were stopping and searching vehicles on the road between Chakdarra and Ouch tehsils though it is not clear this was a systematic effort.

¶4. (SBU) Following the Pakistan military operations in Lower Dir District on April 27, the Tehreek-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) announced a suspension in talks with the NWFP Government until the operations ceased, claiming that the operations violated the Swat peace agreement. TNSM spokesman Amir Izzat Khan said that talks will resume once the military/security operations cease. However, Muslim Khan, spokesman for the taliban in Swat, also announced that the Swat taliban would not lay down their arms until the Nazim-e-Adl regulation was fully implemented and the Darul Qaza, or appellate courts, were formed.

¶5. (SBU) Lower Dir local authorities report that as a result of military operations, between 20,000 and 40,000 individuals have left the northern half of Lower Dir and are seeking shelter with host families in southern Lower Dir and in the neighboring districts of Mardan, Peshawar, Charsadda, and Swabi. UN officials met with civilian and military officials in NWFP to negotiate access to Lower Dir and have agreed to a combined UN security and humanitarian assessment on April 29. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has requested the NWFP Social Welfare Department to resume registration of IDPs, with a primary focus to be on those from Lower Dir and Buner. NWFP authorities have also identified land for two IDP camps in Dir, near Timergara, and at another smaller camp in Mardan near the existing Jalozai Camp. Once these are established, UNHCR said that it was ready to provide supplies.

BUNER UPDATE

ISLAMABAD 00000901 002 OF 002

¶6. (S/NF) In an April 28 meeting, Frontier Corps senior leaders informed U.S. Special Operations Command - Forward (SOC-FWD) Chief that operations in Buner will begin on April 29, moving from Mardan en route to Daggar, the main city in Buner District. However, ISPR has announced airstrikes have begun in Buner and a curfew has been imposed as of April 28. (Comment. While we believe the main effort of the operations will begin April 29, past experience has shown that the Pakistani Military will often launch air operations to interdict key targets before FC troops are actually deployed. End comment.)

¶7. (S/NF) Ref A reported that SOC-FWD has been asked to assist operations with Rover and communication capabilities. So far, USG personnel have been staged at Frontier Corps Headquarters (Bala Hisar - Peshawar), and at this time, military and FC officials plan to have one of our officers deployed with them in their district headquarters in Daggar as operations unfold. FC officials expect to be in Daggar for a day or two. We understand these military operations will occur despite a request from an April 27 jirga in Buner that accepted taliban rule and denounced any military involvement within Buner. (ref B) End note.)

¶8. (SBU) Over the weekend, UN officials report that approximately 350 families have fled Buner district for neighboring districts, but with the expectation of Pakistan military operations over the next few days, these numbers are expected to rise.

SWAT UPDATE

¶9. (C) In an April 28 meeting with Peshawar Principal Officer, Inspector General for the NWFP Police Malik Naveed reported that conditions in Swat District (Malakand Division, NWFP) were deteriorating. Militants, he said, were kidnapping police, patrolling the roads, and had established blockades around Mingora. Naveed commented that militants had used the period of the peace deal to thoroughly penetrate Mingora and nearby Saidu Sharif. He feared that this sort of

presence and control could result in a high level of violence and confrontation in Swat's two primary population centers.

¶10. (C) Overnight, USAID local staff reported that taliban ransacked the offices of a local non-governmental organization (NGO), "Hujra," and Medecins sans Frontieres ("Doctors without Borders"), as well as the Agriculture Bank in Mingora. The militants held the staffs hostage while confiscating the office equipment, vehicles, and medicines. Posters have also reportedly been hung and pamphlets have been distributed to warn Swat media outlets against broadcasting or printing any negative information about the Swat taliban or their activities. While the security situation remains tense, USAID local staff are working from their homes.

¶11. (C) Comment. Some of our work these past months both with the UN agencies and with the GOP is finally bearing fruit, and both appear to be making a real effort to get out ahead of the IDP situation this time. UN officials have sought meetings with Pakistan civilian and military authorities and are pressing to get into Lower Dir. GOP authorities are apparently willing to allow access for an assessment mission, which is also a turn for the better. The NWFP government's decision to quickly identify land on which new camps can be built is also promising and an improvement over the situation last fall when IDPs were being shunted into empty schools and other government buildings.

¶12. (C) While enhanced cooperation is limited to the FC (not yet the Army), it is promising that the FC has offered for a USG SOC-FWD officer to accompany them to the district headquarters in Daggar, Buner, as operations unfold. A Frontier Corps decision to actually allow a U.S. military officer to accompany them to Daggar is an important window of opportunity that could expand our military-military relationship as well as provide an immediate, significant boost to FC effectiveness. End comment.
FEIERSTEIN